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SHORTGRASS COUNTRY by Monte Noelke

One of the countries on the eastern boundary of the Shortgrass Country extended hospitality a few weeks ago by inviting me to come down and speak at their Agriculture Day celebration. Enormous numbers of speakers are available today. Listeners, however, are in shorter supply than any time since the 13 colonies were overrun by such great orators as Tom Jefferson and Ben Franklin.

Nowadays, for a few dollars worth of long distance, slates of windbags can be signed up with enough air to inflate the domes of half the convention centers in Texas. So I was thrilled with the idea of being allowed to talk instead of being asked to come listen to Doctor So-and-So, or Colonel Such-and-Such.

Part of the program was a style show of fashionable and colorful dresses and capes made by local ladies from mohair and woolen yarns. A new textile enterprise from another Shortgrass outpost had sent samples of their wares; however, most of the offerings seemed to be crafted by home talent.

The master of ceremonies was the country judge. I questioned him closely whether these ladies were ranchers' wives or, if not, where they fitted in the community. He'd been watching enough style of the bigwigs on TV to paraphrase his answers by replying, "Yes, that's my

understanding," or "Yet, come to think about it, some are in other fields."

My object wasn't to pin his honor down to quote or misquote him in his own bailiwick. The question was if these ladies in the style show had to help their husbands run the ranch and farm like women are having to do west of San Angelo, they must be doing their sewing and knitting from midnight until time to cook breakfast the next morning.

Wives were hurt worst by the law ending the employing of unpapered aliens. The government once claimed three or four million illegal immigrants were working in the U.S. Seems like the Border Patrol used to round up 40 or 50 head of men off places around San Angelo, depending, of course, on the season of the year. But it's been so long since a wet or a patrolman was by our ranch, such and information isn't readily available.

Whatever the rate of employment of Mexicans, by listening to the closed circuit ranch radio system and eavesdropping over the party line, women must be the big losers from that piece of legislation.

Political scholars claim protest movements are counter-productive in our system of government. But any male school board member who has faced both genders of the public when the citizenry is upset is going to extend a grand amount of respect to the determination of a swarm of mad women.

As good shape as these prairie based hands are in, they might be ready to march on Washington. I wanted to talk to a few of them after the program, but figured they needed time to talk shop about quitting feeding and what to plant this spring...